Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

We wish all our Jewish friends a Happy Purim. Purim in Ioannina was the most popular holiday, a time for children and adults to dress in costume and read the Megilat Esther. Both Esther (in all its variations; Astro, Estir, Steroula, Sterina and Stella) and Mordechai were popular Yanniote names. Every married couple received their own Megillah on their first Purim and we, at Kehila Kedosha, Janina have a large collection of Megilot Esther.

Do join us for the reading of the Megilah on Wednesday night February 28th. Full Holiday schedule in attachment.

This newsletter, our 107th will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website www.kkjsm.org.

We now reach over 8,500 households worldwide, with our community of ‘friends’ continually growing with each newsletter. If you know others who wish to be part of this ever-growing network, please have them contact us at museum@kkjsm.org.

As always, you are all invited to attend our Saturday morning Shabbat services. Just give our Shamas, Sol Kofinas, a heads up by emailing info@kkjsm.org so we are sure that our Kiddush (traditional Greek Jewish Kosher foods) is sufficient. If you wish to sponsor a Kiddush for a special occasion or an Adara, contact Sol.
In January we mourned the passing of important members of our community, both here in the United States, and in Greece. Most lived, fortunately to a ripe old age, becoming repositories of histories soon to be lost. We offer condolences to their families and thanks for all they shared with us.

David Myones passed away on Wednesday Jan 3, 2018 at the age of 93. David, of Blessed Memory, was the son of Simon Mioni (Myones) born in Arta and Rebecca Ganis Myones, born in Ioannina. David is survived by his widow, Sylvia, his wife of 70 years, his sons, Andrew and Ronald and his daughter, Marsha. David’s son, Ronald, describes him as a “great guy, always quick with a smile and a story.” David served in the US Navy during World War II and was part of the “Our Gang” Exhibit (see our website at www.kkjsm.org). Our condolences to the family.

We thank Hy Matza for informing us of the passing of his sister, Esther Jeuda. Esther passed at the age of 90. She was the widow of Morris Jeuda and the daughter of Ezra Matza and Mollie Samuel Matza, both of Ioannina. She is survived by her children, David Jeuda and Madeline Jeuda Aron and her grandchildren. Our condolences to the family.

We mourn the passing of Esther Yomtov, widow of Morris Yomtov. Esther was born June 7, 1921 and passed on January 4, 2018 at the age of 96. She is survived by her son Ben Yomtov and her grandsons, Brian and Todd. Our condolences to the family.
We just learned from Sherri Weitzner, daughter of Mathilda Schinazi, that Mathilda passed away on December 29th at the age of 88. Our condolences to the family.

When we talk of stories, few families have lived a more powerful story than that of the Gatzoyiannis family. Those of you who are familiar with the book, “Eleni,” by Nikos Gatzoyiannis (Gage) are familiar with the story. For those who are not, we publish this obituary of Olga (Gatzoyiannis) Bartzokis, who recently passed away at the age of 90 and extend our sincere condolences to her family, two of whom, Nikos Gage and Eleni Gage, are dear friends of ours.

"NEEDHAM - Olga (Gatzoyiannis) Bartzokis, formerly of Worcester, who in 1948 led her brother and two sisters on a night escape down a mine-laden mountainside from her Communist guerrilla-held village during the Greek Civil War, passed away here at home at the age of 90 surrounded by her family and friends. Known for her dedication to her four children, two of whom became doctors and two lawyers, she was born in Lia, Epirus, Greece on November 28, 1927.

As recounted in the bestselling 1983 book and 1985 film "Eleni" by her brother Nicholas Gage, when Olga's mother, Eleni (Haidis) Gatzoyiannis planned a nighttime escape from their Communist-held village in 1948, an order came from the guerrillas for two women from their house to go to a nearby village to harvest wheat. The mother chose herself and her third daughter, 15-year-old Glykeria, to go and told her oldest daughter, Olga, then 20, to lead the rest of the family on the perilous escape she had organized with several other relatives.

Olga and her siblings fled down the mountain on foot under the cover of darkness and reached Greek government forces the next morning. In retribution, their mother was imprisoned tortured and executed by the guerrillas for planning the escape. After learning of their mother's fate, Eleni's children spent eight months in a refugee camps, then sailed to America to join their father, who had emigrated to Worcester years earlier. Glykeria, who died in 2012, escaped a year later and joined the family in America.
While her two sisters, Alexandra and Glykeria, worked at Table Talk Pies to help support the family, Olga took charge of the Gatzoyiannis household and looked after the two youngest children, Fotini and Nicholas. Two years after her arrival, she married a Greek immigrant from the nearby village of Costana, Konstantinos (Dino) Bartzokis, and they started their own family. Eventually her two older sisters also married fellow Greek immigrants and jointly they bought a three decker at 369 Chandler St., in Worcester, where they created a vertical compound for their children to grow up together.

In 1966 the Bartzokis family moved to Needham, where Dino and his brother opened a successful pizza restaurant. Olga worked next to her husband while raising four children, all of whom won scholarships to top universities in the Boston area. From the savings they were able to put aside from the pizza parlor, Olga and Dino, who predeceased her in 2006, invested wisely in real estate and were able to live their later years in comfort. Olga spent her last years in the same house in Needham where she lived her happiest years with her family. She was attended by caretakers from Greece supervised by her physician daughter, Elenie Bartzokis, who also lives in Needham.

In addition to her daughter, Olga is survived by three sons: Spyro Bartzokis, a lawyer in Orlando, FL and his wife Calliope; Christos, also a lawyer in Orlando and his wife Patricia, and Thomas, a cardiologist in Boca Raton and his wife Peggy. She is also survived by seven grandchildren: Katherine Ashford and her husband Jason of Orlando, Dean Bartzokis and his wife Shannon of Orlando, Kristin Bartzokis of Orlando, Alexander and Elizabeth Bartzokis of Boca Raton, Marina Bartzokis of New York and Melina Chadbourne of Los Angeles.

Three siblings also survive her: Alexandra Stratis of Worcester, Tina Haithis of Milton, and Nicholas Gage and his wife Joan of North Grafton. She is also survived by two great grandchildren and eight nephews and nieces.

Olga was active in both St. Spyridon Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Worcester and St. Demitrios Greek Orthodox Church in Weston, as well as several organizations formed by natives of the Epiros region in Greece.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to St. Spyridon Greek Orthodox Cathedral, 102 Russell St., Worcester, where the funeral will be held at 11 a.m. on Wednesday. Burial will be next to her husband of 55 years at Hope Cemetery. All those attending are invited to a luncheon at 1:00 p.m. at the Manor in West Boylston to celebrate Olga’s life.

Our sincere condolences to Raphael Frezis on the passing of his wife, Yvonne Abastada Frezis, of Volos Greece. She is survived by her loving husband and sons, Elias, Erricos and Victor. In the words of a dear friend of the family, Asher Matathias, Yvonne was “a woman of valor. She was founder of this Greek city’s WIZO chapter, a creative force, a proper helpmate to her husband who long-served as the effective community president!”
Simchas

We are overjoyed at all the beautiful simchas in January. We celebrated four births and two marriages plus the 70th birthday of our President, Marvin Marcus, the 87th birthday of Mollie Cohen, former President of the Sisterhood of Janina and the 93rd birthday of Rabbi Murciano, rabbi of the Sephardic Jewish Center of Forest Hills, the 90th birthday of Cal Attas and the 60th anniversary of Sami and Selma Modiano of Rome and Rhodes. Our community is strong and vibrant!

We welcome Dean Austin Binder into the world and congratulate his parents, Carri and Jeffrey Binder, grandfather, Richard Binder and great-grandmother, Annette Binder. Dean’s great-great-grandparents were Joseph Politis and Esther Josephs, both born in Ioannina, his great-great-great-grandparents were Isaac Politis and Annie Hefetz Politis, both born in Ioannina and, finally, his great-great-great-great-grandparents were Joseph Politis and Hanoula Barouch, again, Yanniotes. That is just on his Politis side of the family!

A big mazal tov to Rhoda and Lloyd Hirsch, proud grandparents to Jaden Janveja Hirsch. Jayden is the first child of Jonathan and Seema Hirsch. Jayden enters into the world the bearer of a proud Romaniote tradition from both the Colchamiro and Matza families. His great grandparents were Jesse Ellison (Colchamiro) and Dorothy Levanthal, his great-great-grandparents were Elias Colchamiro and Spiranza (Matza) Colchamiro, his great-great-great-grandparents were Jessoula Colchamiro and Rachel Galanos Colchamiro and, on the Matza side of the family, Sam Matza and Regina (Bechora) Bacola Matza.
We congratulate Anna Negrin Angelou’s granddaughter, Layla Cowan, the daughter of Rebecca Angelou-Cowan. The Negrins and the Angelous have a long history in our New York community, Anna herself born in Volos and coming to New York with her parents and siblings after the earthquake in Volos. Mazal Tov.

We were overjoyed to hear of a Brit Milah on the island of Corfu. Rabbi Gabriel Negrin performed the circumcision of the son of Danny Mizan.

Mazal Tov to Holly Kaye on the marriage of her son, Ben to Jill Lane.
Mazal Tov to Steve and Silvija Mazza on the marriage of their daughter, Erica Mazza (who is a RN at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston), to Joseph Polack (a Real Estate agent in Cambridge Massachusetts). The marriage took place in Portland, Maine. Erica comes from an illustrious Romaniote family. On her father’s side she is descended from Mazzas and Assers, both from Ioannina. Erica is the granddaughter of Benjamin Mazza and Millie Asser Mazza, and the great-granddaughter of Elias (Louis) Mazza and Anna Cabelli Mazza. The family arrived from Greece on 8/18/1917. Benjamin, his siblings and his parents were all born in Ioannina.

Sami Modiano and Selma Modiano celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in Rome, where they live most of the year. They return to Rhodes for the summer and the High Holidays. Sami was deported from Rhodes in July of 1944 and was one of the few survivors of the concentration camp from Rhodes. Selma has been the love of his life.

We wish Rabbi Murciano a happy 93rd birthday. Rabbi of the Sephardic Jewish Center in Forest Hills, he moved with the congregation when they left the Bronx and has been the spiritual leader of the community for over 60 years.
We wish Molly Cohen a happy 87th birthday. Molly is a former President of the Sisterhood of Ioannina and a true Romaniote, growing up on the Lower East Side. Molly was from the Yohanan and Matza families and lived for many years at 61 Delancey Street. How fast the years have passed. The photo below is from Molly’s 50th birthday!

We wish Cal Attas a joyous 90th birthday. The Attas family is one of our founding families and have continuously remained attached to our synagogue, museum and community.

Dikoi Mas-Los Muestros

Not even the cold January weather could keep our 2017 High Holiday Tour to Jewish Greece members from coming in for a reunion on January 7th. Sam and Lilian Osmos came all the way from Brazil. With Sam’s help we will be putting together a 2018 High Holiday tour where we will spend Rosh HaShanah in Corfu and Yom Kippur in Ioannina!
Past Events at Kehila Kedosha Janina

On Saturday evening, January 27th, we celebrated the special birthday of our President, Marvin Marcus. Marvin’s friends came from all over, many of them having grown up on the Lower East Side with Marvin. There was excellent food, great music (supplied by Avram Pengas’ Noga Group). Seeing our synagogue/museum filled with joy, celebrating our community and our special traditions, was so heartwarming. We have to do it again!
Past Events of Interest

On the International Day of Holocaust Remembrance, the American Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece and the Consulate of Greece in New York hosted an event at Hebrew Union College.

Left to Right: Joseph Toledo, President of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, Rabbi Nissim Elnecave, Archbishop Demetrios, Marvin Marcus, KKJ President

Our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, was back in Washington, DC for a special program at the Greek Embassy. In conjunction with the USHMM, a program on life in Jewish Greece before the Holocaust was presented. The program included visuals (movie clips) and live music (Ladino). We are hoping to work with the Embassy next year for a program about Romaniote Jews.
International Ladino Day at the American Sephardi Federation at the Center for Jewish History in New York held on January 28th.

Jewish Museum (New York City) Exhibit on Costumes through March 18th
Includes Romaniote Costumes from Ioannina

Full exhibit details available [here](#)
Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network  
Tu BiShevat Wine and Fruit Tasting

On January 30th this dynamic group of young members from our community celebrated the holiday of Tu BiShevat with a traditional Seder of fruits and nuts. Young Romaniote and Sephardic Jews in their 20’s and 30’s are welcome to join this group! Email GreekJewishYPN@gmail.com for more information.

Save the Date!

Greek Jewish Festival  
Sunday May 6, 2018  12pm-6pm

Kehila Kedosha Janina is currently planning our fourth annual Greek Jewish Festival for Sunday May 6, 2018. Check our festival website for updates: www.GreekJewishFestival.com
Mark Your Calendars!

Just in time for Pesach: Sunday, March 11th

Kehila Kedosha Janina Museum
is honored to host the presentation of a
newly released cookbook by our dear friend

JENNIFER ABADI
AUTHOR OF
Too Good to Passover

Sunday March 11th at 2:00pm
Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome Street NYC

Too Good to Passover is a collection of
Sefardic and Judeo-Arabic Seder Menus and Memories
from Africa, Asia and Europe.
Many from our own community!

Author will be present for book signing.
Special autographed books at $30
Refreshments will be served.

Please RSVP to museum@kkjsm.org
or 516-456-9336
Jane Mushabac will present her highly acclaimed book “His Hundred Years: A Tale”

Sunday April 8th

Kehila Kedosha Janina Museum
is honored to host the presentation of a fascinating book by

JANE MUSHABAC
(SHALACH MANOT)
AUTHOR OF

HIS HUNDRED YEARS: A TALE

Sunday April 8th at 2:00pm
Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome Street NYC

“This fascinating book by gifted writer and storyteller Shalach Manot reflects on the life of an unusual Sephardic man, his childhood in Turkey, and later, his adaptation to life in America. We follow his adventures and come away with a deeper appreciation and understanding of the Sephardic immigrant experience during the 20th century.” — Marc D. Angel, author of The Crown of Solomon and Other Stories

Author will be present for book signing.
Special autographed books at $12
Refreshments will be served.

Please RSVP to museum@kkjsm.org
or 516-456-9336
Join us for a special Yom HaShoah on Sunday April 15th

Kehila Kedosha Janina invites you to our annual

YOM HAŞHOAH
HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY
CEREMONY
CELEBRATING
SOL KOFINAS

Sunday April 15th at 1:00pm
Kehila Kedosha Janina
280 Broome Street NYC

This Yom HaShoah, we are celebrating Sol Kofinas, our Shamash, and highlighting his story of being a hidden child in Athens during the Occupation of Greece. Sol and his brother Zino survived with the help of the Greek Orthodox Christian Hatzi family. As part of our Yom HaShoah commemoration, we are honored to show Sol Kofinas’ presentation at the Bronx Supreme Court, where he told his story of survival. Filmed and produced by Richard Solomon.

Yom HaShoah service begins at 1pm.
Video presentation and refreshments to follow.

Please RSVP to museum@kkjsm.org or 516-456-9336
News from Jewish Greece

Athens

January was a very busy month in Greece, especially in Athens and Thessaloniki, with events surrounding the International Day of Commemoration of the Holocaust and a visit by Israeli President, Reuven Rivlin to meet with Greek political leaders and leaders of the Jewish Communities in Greece. He then attended events surrounding the planting of symbolic olive trees to commemorate the beginning of the construction of the Holocaust Education Center of Greek Jewry in Thessaloniki.

Commemoration of Holocaust in Athens

President of Israel, Reuven Rivlin, addressed the Greek Parliament, Greek Government officials and the Jewish Communities of Greece

On Monday January 20, 2018 Israeli President Reuven Rivlin addressed a ceremony marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day, held by the Jewish community in Athens, and with the attendance of Holocaust survivors from the Greek Jewish community, among them; Itzik Mizen, 90, who survived Auschwitz-Birkenau; Frances Hogo, 90, who survived Bergen Belsen; Fortunita Hananel Gani, 91, who survived Auschwitz-Birkenau; and David Moshe, 95, who survived Mauthausen. Also attending was Greece’s Education and Religious Affairs Minister, and the Speaker of the Greek Parliament.

“Seventy-three years have passed since the flames of the Auschwitz crematoria were put out” began the President and continued, “Auschwitz has become a symbol of the whole Jewish Holocaust. The United Nations decided that 27th January – the day that soldiers of the Red Army entered Auschwitz and freed the inmates –
should be an international day of remembrance for the victims of the Holocaust. And yet, on the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the lower house of the Polish Parliament passed a law to criminalize talk of “crimes of the Polish nation”, threatening custodial sentences those who use different expressions. This decision is a reminder that it is still beholden upon us to fight for the memory of the Holocaust, as it happened. Research into the Holocaust must be free, open, and sincere. Just as was said by the former Polish President, “One cannot fake history, nor rewrite it, nor hide the truth. Every crime, every offence must be condemned, denounced, must be examined and exposed.” So he said.”

The President said, “The Jewish people, the State of Israel, and the entire world must ensure that the Holocaust is recognized for its horrors and atrocities. Also among the Polish nation there were those who aided the Nazis in their crimes. We will not forget that. There were also others among them who struggled to save the lives of Jews and were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations. Our obligation as children of the Jewish nation, to the memory of our brothers and sisters who were murdered will always be above all other considerations. The duty to remember is a duty to recognize, to know, to try and understand what happened. To understand how the most terrible destruction in history was made possible. With the aim to ensure, Never Again.”

“In recent years there has been increased interest in the Holocaust of Greek Jewry, and I want to thank the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, and the Government of Greece for their efforts to deepen the knowledge and remembrance in this field,” said the President. He continued, “Tomorrow I will participate in the cornerstone laying ceremony for the Holocaust Museum in Thessaloniki. Last year, an agreement was signed between the Greek Education Ministry and Yad VaShem in Jerusalem, to train teachers on educating about the Holocaust. Around two decades ago the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a book on Greeks who were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and just a week ago another book by George Pilichos, the most comprehensive documentation of Greek Jews and Christians sent to Auschwitz. And yet, we still do not know enough about the Holocaust of Greek Jews.”

He added, “We are witnessing the return of anti-Semitic, racist and neo-Nazi outlooks, many manifestations of anti-Semitism are once again reverberating around the world, radical movements are gaining strength, the new right-wing parties are winning electoral achievements with the use of anti-Semitic slogans. These things are happening not centuries after Auschwitz, and not in distant lands. They are happening now on European soil, and elsewhere. Jews feel less secure in their countries, there are those who are forced to hide their Jewishness - these are phenomena that should be denounced. We must not give in to anti-Semitism or xenophobia, we must fight anti-Semitism, racism and hatred of every kind. This is the time for public diplomacy and education! Against xenophobia, against racism, and against anti-Semitism.”

The President continued, “Those who enter into an alliance with anti-Semites and anti-Semitism, those who adopt their language, have no part in the family of nations. We must firmly oppose those who hide their anti-Semitism under the guise of delegitimizing the State of Israel. As well as extreme right-wing parties that do not hide their anti-Semitic background, but repeatedly declare that they love the State of Israel. There is no such thing as loving Israelis and hating Jews, or loving Jews, but hating Israelis.”
Earlier, the President met with leaders of the Jewish community, including the President of the Jewish Communities of Greece and Vice President of the World Jewish Congress, David Saltiel, and President of the Athens Jewish Community, Minos Moissis, along with representatives from Jewish communities in Volos, Chalcis, Larissa, Corfu, Kavala, and Trikala.

“All the children of Israel are responsible one for another,” the President said, “This is true today more than ever”. He said, “The Holocaust harmed the Jewish people, but it also damaged humanity. This harm can only be healed through education in an uncompromising struggle against all hatred or racism”. He praised the community and its leaders for its success in playing an important role in this, and for preserving the community.

Earlier in the day, the President and First Lady participated in the “7 in 70” event, during which a medal of recognition was awarded by the Israeli Ambassador to Greece, to Greek citizens who have made significant contributions to the relationship between Greece and Israel over the seven decades of Israel’s independence. Seven recipients were awarded the honor for their contributions in the fields of politics, culture, economy, sport, music, Jewish communal relations, and literature.

“Our two peoples are brother nations. And there were those who once said, ‘twin souls’,,” said the President, “Today, in this joint event, we cherish the men and women who built and build the connection between Greece and Israel. You, the men and the women at the heart of this event, you are our muses in building the bonds and laying the bridges between the nations, between our peoples. Connections built under the guidance of successive Greek prime ministers, presidents, foreign ministers of the Hellenic Republic, members of parliament.” The President also said, “Today, as Israel celebrates 70 years of its independence, we are pleased to recognize each and every one of you for your contribution to the ties between Israel and Greece.”

**Holocaust Remembrance Day in Athens**

This year, Holocaust Remembrance Day was commemorated by the Greek Parliament on January 29th in a ceremony presided over by the President of the Parliament, Nikos Voutsis. Mr. Voutsis, in his address, stressed the duty of Memory and referred to the unfortunate revival of fascism and Nazism, phenomena that make their reappearance in today’s society. Then, the Israeli MP, Agielet Nahmias, who has Greek origins and referred to the roots of her family, spoke. The importance of memory was stressed and the importance of promoting cooperation between the two countries.

The President of KISE, David Saltiel, in his address stressed the importance of education, pointing out the erection of a column in memory of members of the Greek Parliament who perished in the Holocaust and the soon to be constructed Holocaust Education Center in Thessaloniki. Mr. Saltiel concluded his speech by stressing: "Let it be clear that we will never be complacent, never forget, never stop reacting, and never cease to transmit knowledge and the message of" NEVER AGAIN "... Not simply because we owe it to six million victims, and to all those who fought for freedom, but because we owe it to our children and our children's children."
The event was attended by politicians, survivors of the occupation, the Rabbi of Athens and representatives of Greek Jewry. Among others attended: the deputy ministers of Foreign Affairs Ioannis Amanatidis and Terence Quick, the State Secretary for Immigration Policy Ioannis Balafas, MPs and former ministers Nikos Filis, Dora Bakoyannis, Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, and Tasia Christodoulopouloou, President of the Parliamentary Greece Friendship Committee - Israel Dimitris Sevastakis and the head of the Greek Delegation to the IHRA Stathis Lianos -Liantis. Also Rabbi Gabriel Negrin of Athens, the President and members of the Board of KISE (the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece), the President of the Jewish Museum of Greece, Makis Matsas, Presidents and representatives of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Greece, as well as survivors of the Occupation and the second generation of Holocaust victims.

Film Screenings in Italian Institute of Athens were held on the Occasion of Holocaust Memory Day

On the occasion of Holocaust Memorial Day, the Italian Institute organized on Friday, January 26, 2018, starting at 17.00, series of screenings in the hall of the Institute Events, Patissia 47. The following films screened:

- Time 17.00: Il deserto che fiorisce (desert that blooms) (60 ’), the fourth chapter of the documentary Diaspora, ogni fine ha un inizio (Diaspora, every end is a beginning) of Luigi Monaldo Faccini (2016). This is a documentary film, a research project that turns into a heroic and epic narrative of dispersion caused by Mussolini’s racial laws in 1938. The film is shown in Italian with English subtitles.
- 18.00: The Jews of Thessaloniki (52’) documentary Dimitris Sofianopoulos (1997), in Greek with English subtitles.
- Time 19.00: Anita B. (90’) film Roberto Faenza (2014). This film adaptation of the novel Quanta stella c’è nel cielo of Edith Bruck. The film is shown in Italian with English subtitles.

New Initiatives in the Athens Jewish Community

On Sunday November 19th the event "The Future of Our Community in 5-10 Years" was held within the framework of the "Resilience Project". Our community is one of the three European communities selected to participate in the pilot project. The project, organized by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), aims at improving the capacity of a community to 'recreate' in order to successfully adapt to a constantly evolving environment.

On Mitzvah Day, we can all offer to the world we live in by generously contributing our time. This year, the Athens Jewish Community and the Lauder Athens Jewish Community School have joined forces and we supported the 1st Keratsini Primary School for children with learning difficulties. At Keratsini School there are children from families of Keratsini area and Perama area in Athens, with economic and social problems. For another year, we responded positively to their call. We delivered boxes of food to them in person that our children brought in, a few days before we celebrated Hanukkah here at our school. The food was delivered to the children and their families by our 5th grade pupils. Our Welfare Committee collects clothes to offer to the "Center of Refugee Reception & Solidarity" of the Municipality of Athens.
New Organization of Young Jews in Athens (Athi Neoi)

Young Adult Committee Members, 5th Night of Hanukah, 2017

Our young adults, the Athi-Neoi group, are an active and lively part of the community. They self-organize to coordinate, recruit and run educational and social events, both in Greece and abroad, for students and working professionals. In 2017, Athi-Neoi organized 4 training events, 3 recreational activities and was represented in 5 different conferences of International and European Jewish organizations. Examples include: Congress of the American Jewish Committee, Kesher Conference in Israel and March of the Living in Poland. For the past three years, Athi-Neoi, has coordinated an iLearn lecture series, where professionals are invited to present on various interesting and contemporary issues. A number of social justice volunteer opportunities have also taken place such as a Blood Drive for donation to community members. Our community cannot wait to see what these vibrant young adults plan for the year to come. Stay tuned!

___________________________________________________________________________

Arta

Students in public school in Arta learn about Jewish presence in their city
Thessaloniki

Ceremony in Thessaloniki attended by Israeli President

Israel president attends Holocaust museum ceremony in Greece January 30, 2018 full article here

THESSALONIKI, Greece (AP) — Israel's president and Greece's prime minister attended a foundation ceremony on Tuesday for a Holocaust memorial museum in the Greek city of Thessaloniki, which lost 97 percent of its Jewish community in German World War II death camps.

Reuven Rivlin and Alexis Tsipras symbolically planted two olive trees on the plot. The planned six-story building will be built by 2020, next to the northern city's old railway station, from which around 55,000 Thessaloniki Jews were forced into goods wagons for the camps. About 50,000 died there.

Tsipras said the museum will fulfill an old debt for the city, around 40 percent of whose pre-war population was Jewish.

Overall, about 90 percent of Greece's Jewish population was killed by Nazi forces during the war. "It is very important for Thessaloniki, for the Jewish community, and for humanity that the city is getting a Holocaust museum," Auschwitz camp survivor Heinz Kounio said.

Kounio, 90, was among the first group of Thessaloniki Jews to reach the concentration camp in 1943, together with his sister and parents. All survived because they spoke German and were employed as interpreters.

"I will always remember the five great chimneys that belched black smoke 30 meters (90 feet) high," he told The Associated Press. "And underneath there was something like white swirling steam. Above was the smoke from the bodies, and below from the souls of the dead."

The museum will occupy a plot close to the former Jewish neighborhood of Baron Hirsch, turned by the Germans into a ghetto and transit camp. Designed by Israeli and German architects, its funding will include contributions from the German government and Thessaloniki's Jewish community — currently about 1,300-strong. Community leader David Saltiel told the AP that the project enjoyed strong backing from the city's residents and officials.

"This city had been covered in a veil of silence," he said. "Survivors (from the Nazi camps) didn't find the best possible conditions when they returned, which is why Thessaloniki's Jews were doubtful as to whether this project would go ahead. But now everyone wants it."

Thessaloniki mayor Yiannis Boutaris said the museum would tell the story of Jewish communities from all over Greece and the southwestern Balkans.

"It will symbolize our shame," he said. "For what happened, for what we did, and mostly for what we could not or did not wish to do ... during and after the war."
Hanukah in Thessaloniki Celebrated with Mayor Yiannis Boutaris

International Day of Holocaust Commemoration in Thessaloniki

Righteous Among Nations

Nikos Manias: A "Righteous of the Nations" who saved Jews in occupied Thessaloniki 'ANA-MPA Jan 10, 2018

ATHENA. In a very moving ceremony held at the residence of the Israeli ambassador in Greece, Irit Ben-'Aba, presented the medal and the title of "Righteous Among the Nations" to Nick Manias for saving members of the Karasso family from Thessaloniki, during the Second world war. Nikos’ grandson accepted the award in memory of his deceased grandfather.

In 1943, the seven-member family Karasso, Samuel's father, his mother Rachel, their children Albert, Mary, Zanna Gemma, Israel and Rene, lived in the ghetto Syngrou Thessaloniki. Neighbors and
friends, Nikos Manias and his wife Katina, offered to help them escape from the Nazis. The rescue plan was to transfer them to Athens, which was under Italian occupation. Nikos Manias prepared a rescue plan and offered to share the family into two groups.

The first group consisted of the parents with the three younger children - Gemma Zanna, Israel and Rene – the second group consisted of the two older children, the Albert and Mary. The first group was to leave from Agios Nikolaos Halkidiki, but they were betrayed and they were sent back to Thessaloniki where they were sent to Auschwitz, where died a tragic death.

The second group with Albert and Mary Karasso, arrived in Athens via a complex route, and after Nick Manias had managed to obtain false identities for the two brothers. They took refuge in the house of his brother Nick Mania, where they stayed until the end of the war.

The Israeli ambassador said that we should try to learn something from our history to avoid repeating such events, he said that "until now have been awarded 330 Greeks with this award and we are proud of these people who put human values above their personal safety."

"The message we want to send to the younger generation is that they must be against racism and anti-Semitism and to be tolerant of others, regardless of their religion," noted Israel's ambassador and noted that "the world moves away from liberal ideologies and seeks closed borders and protectionism. Populism is too common. In Europe, 73 years after the Second World War, we have several disturbing phenomena. In Germany, the AFD is in the House, in Austria the far-right party is in the ruling coalition, in France the National Front won large percentages in presidential elections in Hungary and Poland populist parties in power and anti-Semitism growing in Europe and particularly in the USA. Also, in Greece Golden Dawn has positions in the Greek parliament."

Yad Vashem Releases the Last Letters from the Sides family

Full information available here

"Hug our beloved children for us and tell them about us, so that they don't forget us."

These words were written by Elie Sides in his last letter from the ghetto in the Baron Hirsch neighborhood in Thessaloniki to his daughter Lora and son-in-law Robert in Athens, before he and his wife Sarina and their daughter Rita were sent to their deaths in Auschwitz. Laura and Robert survived.

Elie and Sarina Sides lived in Thessaloniki, Greece, on Vassilissis Olgas Street – one of the most elegant and affluent streets in the city. Elie was a merchant and importer of cotton, shoes and clothing, mostly from Pakistan. The couple had two daughters, Lora (b. 1918) and Rita (b. 1925), and the family lived a traditional Jewish lifestyle.
In 1937, Lora married Robert Sarfati, an import-exporter of raw leather, and they settled in Athens. Before the war they had two children, Peter (b. 1938) and Klelia (b. 1939). Rita, Lora’s sister, moved to live with her sister in Athens.

After the German occupation of Greece, Rita moved back to her parents in Thessaloniki. Elie Sides sent his last letter from the ghetto in Thessaloniki. In the letter he describes the terrible conditions of the place, and expresses his hope that they will meet again. Eli and the Jews of Thessaloniki who were deported did not know the destination of their transport. They were told that they were going to be resettled in Krakow, Poland. In the letter, Elie asks his son-in-law Robert for addresses of people Robert knows in Krakow, as well as recommendations about the family, so that he could have them ready when they arrived in Krakow.

Rita was engaged to her cousin Danny Saporta (the son of Isabella, Elie Sides’ sister), who was of Spanish nationality and therefore protected from deportation to the death camps. All attempts by the family to save Rita due to her fiancé’s status failed. Danny failed to reach Thessaloniki in time. In 1943, Elie, Sarina and Rita were sent, together with the Jews of Thessaloniki, to their deaths in Auschwitz. Lora, Robert and the children hid in the outskirts of Athens with the help of false documents. However, due to informants, the Germans came to the family’s hiding place in order to arrest them. Lora and the children succeeded in escaping through the kitchen window. Lora, Robert and the children survived in Athens until liberation. Danny Saporta survived in Athens.

In 1948, Lora and Robert had a third daughter. They named her Rita, after Lora’s sister who was murdered in Auschwitz. In the 1970s, Lora Sarfati submitted Pages of Testimony to Yad Vashem memorializing her parents, Elie and Sarina, her sister, Rita, her maternal grandparents, Isaac and Flora Benardout, and her uncle Isaac Sides. In 2010, Elie Sides’ granddaughter, Klelia Nahmia, a resident of Athens, gave her grandfather’s letter, via family living in Israel, to Yad Vashem – for eternal safekeeping.

---

Tante Alice, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, and Cross Cultural Solidarity
Yvette Nachmia-Messinas’ story of the saving of her family in Greece

Full article here

"Tante Alice” was my maternal grandmother’s sister. Alice and Yvette had the same father, Solomon Camhi, but different mothers. Tante Alice’s mother had died and Solomon remarried my great grandmother Victorin Cahmi. And it seems that Victorin was so loving to Alice, that her other three children had no idea that Alice was not Victorin’s own daughter so much so that Shabetai, her eldest son, asked his mother in French, "mother, am I not your real child too?” And Alice the eldest and Yvette the youngest of the Camhi brothers—Alice, Sabby, Mario and Yvette —were close and shared a strong sisterly bond to old age.

Brotherhood was one of the major values of the Camhi family, and indeed the bond that the four brothers had was exemplary in the solidarity and support they provided to each other. Yvette and Alice lived across from each other, and when Alice needed something she would get out in her balcony in Athens, Greece and call her sister with her distinct accent, stressing the Y of the Yvette: Yyyyyvette. And Yvette would respond to the call.

During the second world war, when Alice lived in Smyrna, today’s Izmir, Turkey she helped rescue her sister, by arranging a marriage blanc with a Turk whom my grandmother never met. During those years, and till the end of the war, Yvette lived under the protection of her older sister. The Camhi sons had joined the resistance. Sabby went in hiding in villages helped out by Giorgos Mavros, who was a textile merchant as was their father
Solomon. Mario who had a pioneering Zionist spirit, helped rescue Greek Jews of the Noar Haivri movement, via Evoia, Greece to Palestine.

My father's family though the Nahmias from Ioannina, Greece had a less fortunate ending. Avramis, Sam, and Solomon Nahmias' families perished in Auschwitz. Only my grandfather's Moisis Nahmias's nuclear family survived. Moisis' family was rescued with the aid of many Greek Orthodox families. In 1943 when he was recovering from an operation that he had in Athens, Moisis was visited by a close friend from Salonica, Moise Yakar. Moise spoke about the Germans, the ghetto and transfers of Salonican Jews. Moise told Moisis "write immediately to have Anna and the kids sent to you to Athens."

The five member family, Moisis, and Anna the parents and Mazal Tov, Iakovos and Herbert all managed to survive the Holocaust in hiding in Athens pretending to be Greek Orthodox. Greek Orthodox people opened their hearts, and homes to them. Anna, Moisis and Herbert hid together, with Phaedra and Giorgos Morfis, and their daughters Panaghiota and Ourania in the Roof neighborhood of Athens. My father Iakovos was all by himself at the beginning at the home of Giannis Aivalis a friend of his father and later, past the war his business partner. Mazal tov who got the Greek name Eftychia during the war stayed with Maria and Mimis Aggelopoulos an acquaintance of Aivalis. And a few months later, my father Iakovos, moved to that house too, where they pretended being their relatives from the village. Moisis Nahmias had to change hiding places often as there was a traitor who had spotted him alive in Athens. Moisis, Anna and Herbert moved to the house of Leandros and Ketty Spiliotopoulou, on Dafnomilis Street.

Then the whole family moved together to the house of Argyro and Demetris Spiliotopoulos family on Spyridonos Trikoupi 11. That was a big house and had room for all five of them along with the kids of the Spiliotopoulos family Aristidis and his wife Aglaia, Theodoros, Aias and Maria. Undoubtedly my father survived due to the friendship and solidarity of these Greek Orthodox families provided to my grandfather and his family. And it is thanks to their spirit of brotherhood, their bravery and risk taking that we are alive today! What the Holocaust has taught me is to pass on the gift of cross cultural solidarity and brotherhood that was handed to my family. To have goodwill for people less fortunate than myself and in need of protection. And it is my intention to forward the opening of heart that my family received back in the Second World War to todays persecuted. On this International Holocaust Remembrance Day let us its survivors around the world be a force of cross cultural and cross religious solidarity, a force that builds bridges, and creates heart to heart connections beyond color, nationality and religion. Let us, the survivors' descendants offer to fellow beings that which our parents and grandparents sought: a helping hand, a supporting word, and a brotherly cooperation to save a life. Let us learn to extend brotherly cooperation to sisters and brothers we don't share the same blood with, the same religion with, the same color with, the same culture with, as deep down, we all know, that cross cultural brotherhood is the only antidote to the scourge of war, and medicine for peace!
Contrasts

Unfortunately, in the past month there have been a series of anti-Semitic desecrations of Holocaust Memorials in Athens and Thessaloniki and the writing of anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls around the synagogue in Volos. It appears that we have much to do to wipe out the ignorance and hatred that perpetuate these actions. Fortunately, in all instances the local governments and the Government of Greece joined the Jewish communities in condemning these actions.

On the other hand, the children of Larissa plant the names of the 82 young victims of the city so that the crocuses will bloom in their memory.

Chalkida

The students of the Pierce Lauder Jewish Studies class have been brushing up on their Jewish history dates both inside and outside of the classroom. Chalkida, a city nearby Athens, was the first trip organized in order to visit the synagogue and the statue of General Frizis. They specifically focused on the community of Chalkida, because it is one of the older Jewish communities. A Greek Jewish hero Colonel Mordechai Frizis resisted the Italians in World War II. The class heard the story from Colonel Frizis's son who described in detail the courage of his father.
Planning a Wedding?

From the Jewish Community in Athens: “Our traditional Synagogue is at your services situated in the oldest part of Athens near the Acropolis. Rabbi Gabriel Negrin, who is fluent in English, Hebrew and Greek, will officiate the wedding ceremony.”

News from Greece

Massive protests were held in Thessaloniki protesting the use of the name “Macedonia” in the new name for the Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Full article here
Albania

What made Muslim Albanians risk their lives to save Jews from the Holocaust? Full JTA article here

TIRANA, Albania (JTA) — Most anywhere else in Nazi-occupied Europe, an encounter with police would have likely sealed the fate of Jewish refugees like Nissim and Sarah Aladjem and their 10-year-old son, Aron.

Instead, when the family was detained by police in the Muslim nation of Albania 75 years ago, it was the key to their survival. The family was fleeing Bulgaria when they were detained by five police officers working for the occupation forces. Instead of turning them over to his occupiers, as he should have done with undocumented Jewish aliens, one of the policemen helped the Aladjems find shelter with other locals. Far from unusual in Albania, the actions of that officer in 1943 — he has not been identified — attest to the prevalence and boldness of the efforts to rescue Jewish refugees in this nation situated northeast of Greece. It is perhaps the only Nazi-occupied country that had more Jews after the Holocaust than before. Owing partly to what locals call Besa, a local code of honor and neighborly conduct, the rescue and survival of approximately 2,000 Jews by Albanians for decades had remained largely unknown. But thanks to recent studies and films, it is taking its place as a rare ray of light during otherwise dark times.

The Aladjems’ story is told in an award-winning 2012 documentary film titled “Besa: The Promise.” It tells the story of Rifat Hoxha, who ran the pastry shop to which the family was taken by the police officer and arranged their shelter. The film follows the unlikely story of how, a decade ago, Hoxha’s son, Rexhep, returned three Jewish prayer books to members of the Aladjem family living in Israel. During the war, his Jewish guests had given the prayer books to Hoxha for safekeeping after hiding at his house for half a year. As with many other Jews who survived in Albania — most of them refugees from neighboring Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Serbia — the rescue of the Aladjems was “an open secret,” Rexhep Hoxha, a father of two who was born in 1950, told JTA. “Not only the police knew, but all the neighbors knew as well. There was a circle of silence. It’s something connected to our culture. You don’t betray your guest, and you certainly don’t betray your neighbor.”

To accommodate the Aladjems, Hoxha, who died in 1987, shuttered his bakery in the busiest time of the year — police brought the Jews to his shop just ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday — and brought them to his home, Aron Aladjem recalls in the film. Then he put them up in a room occupied by his in-laws, who temporarily moved out to make room for the guests.

“My grandfather was a Muslim cleric. For him to leave his house and make room for this Jewish family, there is no tolerance more beautiful than this,” Rexhep Hoxha said. Israel recognized his father posthumously in 2015 as a Righteous among the Nations — the Jewish state’s honorary title for non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

In many cases, numerous members of rescuers’ families knew of such acts and became involved, according to a 2008 essay by Yad Vashem researchers.

“This included the extended family and even some close friends,” the essay said. “Often the Jews were divided between relatives and friends.”
Some of the Jews in hiding – and especially the 200 Albania-born Jews who survived the war — were feeling secure enough to operate small businesses during the occupation years, according to the essay. Some never bothered to go into hiding, trusting their neighbors would not denounce them and warn them ahead of inspections. Albania currently has 75 so-called righteous gentiles — a small number in absolute terms but one that, examined relatively, means that a Jew there was at least 10 times likelier to be rescued than in Lithuania, which has almost 900 righteous, or Poland, which has 6,706. Last year, to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day (which this year falls on Jan. 27), the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a conference in Tirana titled “We Remember: Promoting human rights through the lens of Holocaust education and remembrance.”

Traces of the hospitality aspect of the Besa code are still visible today in rural Albania, an Adriatic republic whose green and black mountains are scarred by thousands of abandoned and elaborate Cold War-era bunkers and reservoirs built by its communist dictator, Enver Hoxha (no relation to Rifat).

“If I’m traveling for work and get stuck somewhere, I only need to knock on someone’s door and I have a place to sleep for the night,” said Petrit Zorba, a meteorologist and director of the Albania-Israel Friendship Society.

Drivers often signal to others with their lights to warn of speed traps in Tirana, a chaotic but clean city of 1 million where the sound of the call to prayer from the Et’hem Bey mosque is heard several times a day across the main Skanderbeg Square. According to Zorba, the rescue of Jews in Albania was “a matter of tradition, and had very little to do with religion.” Yad Vashem has no insight into what role religion played in the rescue efforts. But Baba Mondi, the leader of the secretive Bektashi Shiite sect, which is headquartered in Albania, says that religion’s role in the rescue was both central and indirect. Baba Mondi, leader of the Bektashi sect of Albanian Muslims, at his office in Tirana, Nov. 7, 2017. (Cnaan Liphshiz)

“In Albania there is a tradition of religious tolerance,” Baba Mondi, wearing his traditional white-and-green robe and fez-like hat, told JTA in November. “I wouldn’t mind my children marrying a Jew, a Christian, whoever. So while the rescue maybe didn’t come from a religious commandment, it grew out of a religious environment where all fellow human beings are our brethren.”

He gave the interview at the world center of his sect — a magnificent domed structure with 12 arches that was inaugurated in the city’s eastern outskirts in 2015. Its ornate ceiling features arabesque designs and the traditional Bektashi sun symbols arranged around an elevated turret. On sunny days, its golden dome reflects and amplifies light that it catches from the snowy top of Mount Dajti overlooking Tirana.

Forthcoming in speaking about the rescue of Jews, Baba Mondi declined to reveal anything of substance about the customs of his sect, which for centuries has been persecuted by other Muslims for its mystic interpretations of Islam. In addition to Besa, the relatively benign nature of the German occupation may have also played a role in how Albanians were more willing to take in Jews than Poles, Ukrainians and others across occupied Europe.

“German authorities did not aggressively seek, deport or exterminate Jews from Albania proper after occupying the country in November 1943,” according to Daniel Perez, a historian who wrote about the Holocaust years in Albania in a 2013 book titled “Bringing the Dark Past to Light.”

But Aron Aladjem says he witnessed a different reality.
“The Germans ruled there and on every tree, every electrical pole we saw partisans hanging — many of them hanged to scare people into not hiding partisans and Jews,” he recalls in the film.

The Germans, who replaced the Italians in 1943 as the occupying force in Albania, were not the only ones that Hoxha had to watch out for, according to his son.

“Having a religious book, Jewish or Muslim, was not a good idea for our family, which already had a cleric, under communism,” Rexhep Hoxha said. “Any connection to Jews or Israel, whom we were told was an enemy of socialism, was ill-advised.”

The culture of silence under communism partly explains why the rescue of Albanian Jews has remained relatively unknown for many decades, according to the Yad Vashem researchers. The imprint of the communist era, they wrote, caused “people to fear being linked to the ‘wrong’ resistance group, even after the regime had been changed.” And Albanians had some very wrong resistance groups. Most notably, the 1st Albanian Waffen SS Division, manned by hundreds of ethnic Albanians — many of them from Bosnia and also Kosovo, which during the German and Italian occupations had been lumped together with Albania. The details of their activities are sketchy, but they are known to have rounded up Jews who belonged to the group of at least 249 Kosovar Jews who ended up at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany, according to Perez. But according to some historians, many Jews who were rounded up by Albanian collaborators were transferred to minimum-security camps in Albania proper, where the vast majority were kept alive in defiance of Germany’s orders and policy on Jews.

Due to these complications and communist-era censorship, the first written account of the rescue story was published relatively late, in 1992, after the fall of communism. One of the first stories to emerge in documented form was of Beqir Qoqja, a Muslim tailor who in 1943 took in his friend, a Jew by the name of Avram Eliasaf Gani from the city of Vlore, after the Germans had arrested Gani’s brother. Qoqja, who was recognized as a Righteous Among the Nations in 1992 and died in 2005, hosted Gani at great risk at his Tirana home, where Qoqja was living with his wife, Naile, and at least one daughter, according to Qoqja’s son Fatos.

“A Jewish filmmaker once told me that if he were asked to risk his own child’s life to save another man’s, he wouldn’t do it,” said Fatos, 67, who has two children. “But I’d do exactly as my father had done. It’s Besa.”

The early 1990s were also the time when European societies became aware of the dark side of the Albanian code of honor: the slaying of men, including innocents, in blood feuds and honor killings that are dictated by the code of Kanun. They have cost thousands of lives and sent many thousands into exile as asylum seekers. Despite the cruelties of the Kanun system, however, ordinary Albanians found the Nazi violence against Jews unconscionable because it targeted women and children, according to Eliezer Papo, a scholar on Balkan Jewish history at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel.

“Common humanness, rolled into the Albanian patriarchal, tribal ethos, compelled these people to rescue Jews,” Papo suggested. And whereas “men killing other men is part of life in Albanian tradition, the targeting of women is an unspeakable monstrosity.”

He noted that killing dozens of men from one family to avenge the slaying of just one member of a feuding clan is not unheard of in Albania.

“But those same feuding families,” Papo said, “would risk everything to rescue one another’s daughters.”
Turkey

Rabbi Gabriel Negrin and the Community’s Religious Committee participated at the Sephardic Shabbaton recently held in Istanbul, Turkey. The meeting included Rabbis and other religious representatives from the Balkans.

As Israel-Turkey tensions rise, so does foot traffic to Istanbul’s Jewish Museum
Full article from Times of Israel here

ISTANBUL — Jews are not exactly popular in Turkey these days, especially after US President Donald Trump’s recent recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The move infuriated Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who at a summit of Muslim nations in Istanbul labeled Israel a “terror state,” said Trump had a “Zionist mentality” and warned that Jews have no right to “appropriate” Jerusalem.

But relations between Turkey and Israel — and by extension, between Turks and their native Jewish population — have been tense for years, even prior to a 2010 diplomatic row and subsequent attempt by the Turkish ship Mavi Marmara to break through Israel’s maritime Gaza siege.
More recently, in June 2017, far-right protesters kicked the doors of Istanbul’s historic Neve Şalom Synagogue and threw stones at the heavily guarded building after Israel imposed security measures at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem following a deadly attack there.

Still, all the violence and rhetoric hasn’t stopped a steady stream of curious locals and foreigners from visiting the Quincentennial Foundation Jewish Museum of Turkey — a cultural gem housed within Neve Şalom that chronicles 500 years of Jewish history.
During a trip to Turkey last November, I decided to stop by Neve Şalom for the first time in 26 years. While it took only seven minutes to walk there, it took much longer to get inside. That’s no surprise, given the incredibly tight security following two deadly terrorist attacks against Jewish institutions in 1986 and 2003 that killed a combined 48 people and injured dozens more. This is in addition to an unsuccessful bombing attempt in 1992, claimed by Hezbollah that hurt no one.
Two armed guards stood at the entrance to the unmarked synagogue along Büyük Hendek Caddesi. After inspecting my Israeli passport and making a phone call, one of them escorted me around the corner and into the building itself — which is protected by a four-inch-thick blast-resistant black metal door along with a mandatory X-ray scan. Once inside, I was greeted with a trilingual welcome mural from the Bible in Hebrew, Turkish and English: “And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away... and pray unto the Lord for it.”

It’s a comforting thought for uncertain times such as these, and one echoed by the people who work at the museum.

“I work at a Jewish institution that has been targeted three times, and I still keep coming to work every day,” said Nisya İşman Allovi, curator and director of the Museum of Turkish Jews. “So I feel secure.”

İşman, who has run this museum for nearly 16 years, declined to discuss politics or her views of the Turkish president. But long before Erdoğan’s latest outbursts against Israel, the attitude in the country towards Jews had clearly taken a turn for the worse. According to the Istanbul-based Hrant Dink Foundation’s Media Watch on Hate Speech project, Jews are the most frequently targeted ethnic group in Turkish media. Of 2,466 examples of hate speech published in Turkey’s local and national media in the second trimester of 2017, some 493 singled out Jews, while 472 targeted Syrians. Greeks were third on the list with 256 examples, followed by Armenians, Cypriot Greeks, Christians, British people and Buddhists.

The report also said Turkish media outlets frequently demonize Jews as a collective group, with the term “Jews” often used instead of “Israeli” or “Israel Defense Forces.” Jews are portrayed as the “hidden power” in conspiracy theories and presented as a “threat against Turkey.”

In addition, a 2015 Anti-Defamation League global survey showed that 71 percent of Turks harbor anti-Semitic views — one of the highest percentages in Europe. Yet this museum takes the long view, focusing on Jewish heritage and its rich contributions to both the historic Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. Open every day of the week except Saturday, it was inaugurated in 2001 at the now-closed Zulfaris synagogue and relocated to Neve Şalom in December 2015.

For example, there’s a panel on Jewish lawmakers who have served in the Turkish Parliament. There’s also a copy of the 1925 book, “Die Juden der Türkei,” in which author David Trietsch wrote that 10,000 Ashkenazi Jews lived in Istanbul alone. Religious artifacts on display include a “kosher for Passover” wooden matzah seal, an 18th-century shofar, an etrog box from the Italian Jewish community and a 200-year-old silver cup. There’s also a 19th-century brass Hanukkah menorah crafted in the shape of an Ottoman minaret, and a panel devoted to Sabbatai Zevi, the false messiah who raised the hopes of thousands of Jews in the 1600s, but ultimately converted to Islam. Menorah for Hanukkah, on display at the Jewish Museum of Turkey in Istanbul, is designed in the shape of an Ottoman minaret. (Larry Luxner/Times of Israel)

Turkey is today home to about 17,000 Jews — roughly 16,000 of whom live in Istanbul. The remaining 1,000 or so are concentrated in Izmir, Edirne, Antakya, Bursa and Adana. Only 30 Jews live in Turkey’s capital city, Ankara, down from 578 in 1995. In Istanbul, which once had 19 synagogues, only Neve Şalom and two others are functioning today; all are located in the city’s lively Galata district, on the European side. In fact, new street signs in Turkish and English now direct visitors to the museum.

“This is the only place Turks can learn more about Jewish culture,” İşman told me, estimating her institution receives at least 10,000 visitors a year, 70% of them locals. “They can see the synagogue, tour the museum
and learn about Turkish Jews.” As a reporter, I was naturally intrigued by an exhibit on Jewish journalism in Turkey. Among other curios, there’s an old manual typewriter in a glass case that belonged to Avram Leyon, who helped found the newspaper Şalom in 1947. (The weekly still publishes one page in Ladino, the language of Sephardic Jews). Visitors can also pull out panels containing the front pages of various other now-defunct local Jewish newspapers, including El Telégrafo and La Boz de Oriente. Neve Şalom and the museum attract relatively few tourists from Israel and the United States, which are home to 83% of the world’s 14.5 million Jews. No doubt many of them are scared away by the threat of terrorism; in fact, a clock in the hallway of the synagogue shows the exact time, 9:17 a.m., when the 1986 attack took place.

“We used to get more Americans, but they haven’t been coming to this country much for two or three years now, due to the security issues,” said İşman. “Israelis used to go mainly to the casinos in Antalya, but culturally speaking, not to Istanbul. Now we have many more visitors from Argentina, Brazil and other South American countries — and even people coming from Korea.”

On November 5, the museum hosted a European Day of Jewish Culture, featuring concerts, discussions, book signing, a film screening and a symbolic wedding. Some 1,300 people came, most of them Turks. On December 19, it threw a Hanukkah party for the public — most of them Muslim — in which a menorah was lit and prayers were recited. And on January 3, the museum opened a new exhibit jointly with the Spanish Embassy titled “Beyond the Duty.” Regardless of the latest tensions over Jerusalem and Erdoğan’s latest rants against the “international Jewish conspiracy,” İşman said she plans to stay in Turkey.

“This is my culture and it’s not easy to start over somewhere else,” she said. “I cannot speak on behalf of anyone else, but I would like to be an optimist about the future.”

---

Bulgaria

**Repairs carried out on Sofia Synagogue** Full article [here](#)

The two slim turrets of the Central Synagogue in Sofia have undergone restoration work, which was completed around New Year’s, according to the Sofia Globe.

Both the northern and southern tower of the building urgently needed to be refurbished. The construction work started in September of 2017.

The work was carried out under the oversight of Shalom, the umbrella Jewish organization. The Globe said donors to the project included the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), Charles and Susan Knapp, and Asher Ostrin.

No further details were provided.

The synagogue had undergone a lengthy and fitful general restoration process that was completed in 2009 in time for gala centenary celebrations.

Designed by Austrian architect Friedrich Grünanger (1856-1929) the Central Synagogue is the largest synagogue in the Balkans and one of the largest in Europe. Tsar Ferdinand himself cut a ribbon to formally inaugurate the building in September 1909. The eclectic design, with a huge flattened dome and slim turrets, combines Byzantine and Moorish styles. The dome has a diameter of 19 meters and a height of 23 meters; its ceiling is painted to portray the heavens – a sea of stars on a blue background. The sanctuary is further decorated with multicolored mosaics, marble columns, ornamental carvings and other types of wall ornamentation. A brass chandelier weighing more than 2,200 kilograms, a large candelabra and other decorations were imported from Vienna.
Bulgaria continues its campaign of historical revisionism

This year, once again, Bulgaria commemorated International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27th by talking about the role of Bulgaria in saving “their” Jews, not only forgetting to mention their complicity in the deportation of the Jews of the Bulgarian Occupied Zones of Greece and Yugoslavia, but, now defining themselves as “administrators” rather than occupiers.

For us, at Kehila Kedosha Janina, this is personal, since many of us lost family in the “Bulgarian Zones of Occupation,” in Bitola (Monastir), Kavala, Drama, Komotini, Xanthi, Serres and Alexandroupoli, Soufli and Nea Orestis.

As stated countless times, to acknowledge their complicity in the murder of Jews in the Bulgarian Zones of Occupation would in no way diminish the Bulgarian role of saving Jews in Bulgaria proper, BUT not to acknowledge their role in the murder of Jews in the Bulgarian Zones of Occupation diminishes their humanity.

We must, unfortunately, stay vigilant. If you find any perpetuation of this myth and denial, please contact the perpetrators and contact us at museum@kkjsm.org.

In memory of the Jews deported by the Bulgarians to Treblinka and their deaths, we publish these photos. Photos do not lie.

In memory of Rabbi Azuvi of Kavala

Alexander Belev of Bulgaria supervising deportations

________________________________________

Articles of Interest to All

Tunisia

Tunisia: Jewish population determined to stay despite anti-Semitic violence Full article here

Tunisia has declared itself a multi-faith state. But the attack on the Jewish school in Djerba shows that radical anti-Semitism has its adherents in Tunisia, too – primarily in jihadist circles.

"It's part of the protest against rising prices." The laconic words of Elie Trabelsi, the head of the Jewish community on the Tunisian island of Djerba, commenting on his Facebook page about the attack on the community's school late on Tuesday evening. Persons unknown threw incendiary material from a moving car into the reception hall of the building. Nobody was hurt; the bombs caused only a small amount of damage.
The perpetrators were clearly taking advantage of the temporary reduction in Tunisian security forces on the island. They were withdrawn from Djerba, and many other provinces, because of the protests in a number of Tunisian cities. Tunisians have been protesting for days against tax increases and price hikes. In recent weeks, incitements to violence against Jews in Tunisia were published on social media networks.

"We must harass the Djerba synagogue until it is gone," said one post. "We must drive the Jews out of Tunisia and set fire to the synagogue in Djerba," said another.

Trabelsi had already voiced his opposition to pronouncements of this kind in early December last year. "These people always find a reason to incite others, using the pretext of a revolutionary cause," he wrote on Facebook. "I feel sorry for you," he said, addressing the perpetrators.

Spain

Spain Honors Ladino language of Jewish exiles Full article here

More than five centuries after King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella expelled Spain’s Jewish population, the still-spoken language of the exiles is to be formally honoured by the country’s leading linguistic authority. The Spanish Royal Academy (RAE) has announced plans to create a Judeo-Spanish branch in Israel that will sit alongside the 23 existing academies dedicated to the Spanish languages across Latin America and in countries such as Equatorial Guinea and the Philippines. Speakers of Judeo-Spanish, or Ladino, fled Spain and settled elsewhere in Europe as well as in the Middle East, North Africa and Latin America.

The director of the RAE, Darío Villanueva, described Judeo-Spanish as “an extraordinarily important cultural and historical phenomenon” that was overdue an academy of its own. “The Jews who were expelled in 1492 dispersed around Europe and the Americas, taking with them the Spanish language as it was spoken at the time of their expulsion,” he told the Guardian. “All of this has been miraculously preserved over the centuries. There’s literature, folklore, translations of the Bible and even modern newspapers written in Ladino.”

Not only did Ladino preserve many archaic Spanish words, Villanueva said, it was also influenced by the languages of the countries in which the refugees settled. Villanueva said nine Ladino specialists had so far been appointed to help pave the way for the new institution, which will form part of the Association of Spanish Language Academies.

“Through these nine academics we can now [lay the foundations] for a Judeo-Spanish academy to be based in Israel, just as we did in the 19th century with the Latin American academies.”

He added: “The idea isn’t to absorb Ladino into modern Spanish, it’s the opposite: to preserve it.” Isaac Querub, the president of Spain’s Federation of Jewish Communities, welcomed the move to recognize what he called the “rich and profound cultural legacy” of Ladino.
“It’s the language that mothers have used to rock their babies to sleep with for more than five centuries,” he said. “It’s the language that’s been used to pass down recipes and the one that is spoken in the intimacy of home. Even after all these hundreds of years, it’s still being used.”

Querub said the move was one of the encouraging steps that Spain had recently taken to make up for the injustices of 1492, but he said he would prefer the institute to be based in Spain rather than Israel. Shmuel Refael, director of the Salti Centre for Ladino Studies at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, said the language represented a “culture and an identity” for the Sephardic Jews whose community developed on the Iberian peninsula before 1492.

He estimated there were around 400,000 people in Israel with some knowledge of the language. “It depends on what you consider a ‘speaker’ to be: someone who knows a few words of the language, or someone who can read and write the language,” he said.

Two years ago, both Spain and Portugal brought in laws to facilitate the return of the descendants of the thousands of Jews who were forced from the countries at the end of the 15th century.

The Spanish government said its offer of citizenship was intended to correct the “historical wrong” in which the country’s Jewish population was banished, forced to convert to Catholicism or burned at the stake. Portugal said that although it was impossible to make amends for what had been done, the offer of nationality represented “an attribution of a right”.

New Items for Sale

Contact us at museum@kkjsm.org for prices and info for ordering
The first Shabbat in February we read the Torah portion "Yitro" [Jethro], the central event being "Matan Torah" – the giving of the Torah, in the form of the Ten Commandments, on Mt. Sinai. Yet the portion is named after Jethro – Moses' father-in-law who came to him before the giving of the Torah in order to express his awe and wonderment at all the miracles he, and other nations, had heard that God performed for the nascent Israelite nation. Our Sages then asked how did Jethro, who after all was still a Midianite Priest and idol worshipper, warrant having a Torah portion named after him?

The next section of the portion provides the answer. As Jethro observes how Moses, who at that point is literally the only judge for the entire nation, sits in judgment from morn till night, he understands that this system cannot last long, since besides Moses' own health, the long wait for "their day in court", would only lead people to being angry, not to mention the possibility that their turn might never arrive. He then offers practical and objective advice to Moses, whereby he create a higher and lower court system run by honest and wise men of Moses' personal choosing, with Moses serving essentially as a Supreme Court and Appellate Court for the most difficult cases. Jethro's suggestion is accepted hands down, and this despite his being an idol-worshipper, which would normally disqualify any idea or innovation whatsoever.

But this is really the first of many more examples over history where Jews and Judaism adopted totally alien – and often highly questionable practices in terms of their origins. In fact, many are so entrenched that most Jews are not even aware of their "questionable" origins.

We can start with the fact that both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds are written in Aramaic, and not Hebrew, because the former was the dominant lingua franca of the time. The Mishna had been composed in Hebrew in the Land of Israel, but by the time the Talmud was written down, if it was to be studied and understood by even the most brilliant scholars, had to be Aramaic. Further on, when Jews returned from the Babylonian exile to build the Second Temple and revive the Jewish commonwealth in the Land of Israel, they brought with them Babylonian names of the months of the year: Tishrei, Heshvan, Kislev, etc. In the Torah and most of the rest of the Bible, months are only referred to by number: "In the first month, second month...", etc., but the influence of the local culture penetrated the Jewish nation as well, and the norm became to use the Babylonian names, which often even refer to some Babylonian deity! But the masses found it easier to identify the Hebrew months by names and not numbers, and so became the norm.

Perhaps the most blatant example of adopting a foreign, and in this case a totally Christian innovation, is the very system of the division of the entire Bible into chapters and verses. In Jewish tradition, there are "open" and "closed" "perashiot", and no chapters or verses per se. This tradition is still maintained, as well as the divisions of each Torah portion into the aliyyot (Cohen, Levi, Israel) that we follow. For but this system was basically limited to the Jewish world, and in the 13th century, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, instituted the chapter and verse system we all use today. And while his motivation was certainly not to help the Jews, his system was so helpful and effective for the masses that Judaism also adopted it as a source of reference and standardization, without discarding or minimizing Jewish tradition in the slightest. Again, despite its very Christian origins, Langton's objective standardization made it an indispensable tool for Jewish Torah and Bible study as well.
And while we are commanded, in general, not to adopt "non-Jewish" customs and culture, these examples certainly prove that there are many exceptions to the rule, with the underlying justification being the objectivity and efficacy such practices allow, without harming Jewish traditions in any way.

Request for Help

Need info on Kavala in the 1920s and 1930s.

Karen Batshaw is working on a book that will include the Nazi occupation and deportation of the Jews in Kavala. She is seeking info on life during the 1920s and 1930s in Kavala. If anyone has stories to share with her, she can be reached at kbatshaw@aol.com

Need info on divorce and ghets. If someone was a soldier in the Albania campaign and didn't come back, could it be assumed they were dead, or was the woman never declared a widow free to marry again. Could a man send his wife a ghet from far away, a paper that said I divorce you and would that work?

Thanks, Karen

New pictures in our collection

We thank Elias Pitsirilos for this picture of the old synagogue outside the Kastro
So many of you have applauded our efforts. We thank those who have sent in contributions.

If you would like to make a contribution to Kehila Kedosha Janina, please send your check (in US dollars) made out to *Kehila Kedosha Janina*, to us at 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002 (attention Marcia). Your donation will enable us to continue to hold services and preserve our special traditions and customs, and to tell our unique story through our Museum.

When you are in New York, visit us on Broome Street. We are open for services every Saturday morning at 9:30am and all major Jewish holidays and our Museum is open every Sunday from 11am-4pm and by appointment during the week.

*Kehila Kedosha Janina E-Newsletter – Number 107*
*February 2018*
*Kehila Kedosha Janina*
*280 Broome Street, New York NY 10002*
*Website: [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org)*
*Email: museum@kkjsm.org*

Your donations enable us to continue our work. You can send donations via mail directly to 280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002 or you can donate via our website [www.kkjsm.org](http://www.kkjsm.org)